

Issue: Black market organs

Recently, the New York Times featured a front page story about “The organ trade: a global black market” which traced the illegal sale of a kidney for transplant to a woman from New York. The donor was from Brazil, the transplant operation took place in South Africa and the entire procedure was allegedly done under the auspices of an Israeli organ trafficking ring.

This story is extremely disturbing to those of us who have long supported and enforced the law in the United States which prohibits the buying and selling of human organs. It is even more disturbing that altruistic organ donation in the US has not been able to help enough people, resulting in desperate actions being taken, like that of the New York woman in the New York Times story.

The New Jersey Organ and Tissue Sharing Network supports the National Organ Transplant Act (NOTA) which prohibits the sale of organs and tissues. We have worked hard to build public trust in our system, and are concerned that reports of illegal activities might erode that trust in some way.

It has been the traditional position of the organ and tissue donation community that donation should be based on altruism. The “gift of life” is just that, it should not be bought and sold. There is great concern that the human body will turn into a commodity and there will be decreased respect for life if organs can be purchased, as exhibited in the NY Times story. Another concern is that organ donations will only be available to the wealthy, creating a caste system for transplantation. There is also the desire to maintain the pure altruistic motive for donation to avoid those who might not provide a truthful medical history for fear of not being eligible to donate. An accurate medical history is the first step in assuring that organs being donated are free of disease. Stories like the one in yesterday’s paper also point out that there are health risks for all involved.

We at NJ Sharing Network condemn illegal organ trafficking and urge everyone to become an organ and tissue donor to increase the legal supply of organs, thus lessening the allure of these black market transplants.